

JOSEPH WRIGHT

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This is a trial essay to know one linguist and his works, and to get solid knowledge of his background, his role in his time, and the subsequent developments in linguistics. 'One linguist', here, is Joseph Wright, 'one of the ablest linguists, if not quite in the modern sense of the word, that England has ever produced.'¹ In Part I, his life,² and in Part II, his works will be dealt with.

PART I

Joseph Wright was born on 31 October, 1855, at Thackley, a village three miles north of Bradford. His grandfather, James Wright, was a tenant farmer who combined the cultivation of about forty acres of land with the hand-loom weaving which was one of the staple industries of the district. Dufton Wright, the third of his five sons and the father of Joseph Wright, deserted weaving for quarrying which was the other local industry. "My father," said Joseph Wright, "was a cheerful, good-tempered chap, singing snatches of songs, very kind and friendly, never quarrelsome ... He was fond of poaching, and always kept a dog, however badly-off we were, he never wanted to work." He found employment at the ironstone mines near Middlesbrough in 1861, and left his wife and children to the charge of the parish, though he returned later, and died at home in 1866.

Fortunately his wife, Sarah Anne Atkinson, was a woman of strong will and untiring industry. She found a one-roomed cottage which would hold herself and her four children, and set to work to bring up her family by her own efforts. "The story

of Joseph Wright's life would be incomplete without some account of his mother," wrote Mrs. E. M. Wright, the author of the biography, and continued: "From her he inherited many of those personal characteristics which had made him what he is, and it was her ambitious spirit, her heroism in battling through hardships, her dogged, selfless perseverance that lifted him on to the first rungs of the ladder of fortune and fame." ¹

Joseph Wright, the second son, was a wage earner from the age of six. He began as a donkey-boy, carrying quarrymen's tools from the quarry to the blacksmith, for which he got eighteen pence a week from the smith, and a penny from each of the quarrymen. When he was seven his mother took him to Sir Titus Salt's mill at Saltaire, where he became a 'doffer', that is a boy whose duty was to remove full bobbins from the spindles of a weaving frame and replace them by empty ones. He earned at first one and six pence, rose later to three and six per week, and earned a few pence more by odd job. As a half-timer he worked from 6 to 12:30 one week, and from 1:15 to 5:30 the next, and began his education at the factory school for half-timer, where he learned the alphabet, some arithmetic, and a few scraps of scripture or moral verse. When he was thirteen he left Salt's mill for a new one built by Wildman at Bingley. His wages rose to nine shillings a week, but the doffer's job was a blind alley, so his mother apprenticed him to wool-sorting which offered a better prospect. By skill as a sorter he came to earn between twenty and thirty shillings a week, for it was the best paid work in the mill, and it was piece-work. He handed his wages to his mother, and since his father died in 1866, and his elder brother had gone to sea, he became the main-stay of the family. In 1869 they moved from the one room cottage in which they had lived to a cottage with five rooms, and Wright was able to furnish it from his earnings. He was now 'father, husband, son, and companion' to his mother and 'plunged, when a mere child, into the severest battles of life.' "My mother and I," said

Wright, "struggled hard for the sake of my two brothers, who were then little children. We were determined that their lot should not be so hard as ours, so that we did manage to give them some schooling... In fact, they could read and write long before I ever dreamt of such luxuries."

About this time Wright began to educate himself. He heard men in the mill talking about the war between France and Germany. It excited his curiosity, and he learned to read the newspapers. When he had taught himself reading and writing he attended a night-school, where he picked up some French, and later a little German. Later still he attended classes in arithmetic, Euclid, and algebra, at the Mechanics Institute at Bradford, though it meant a three mile walk each way twice a week. He took lessons in shorthand, too, and in April, 1875, obtained a certificate for his knowledge of Pitman's system.

Side by side with his thirst for knowledge his instinctive desire to teach developed itself. In 1873 he set up a class at his mother's house in the evenings; sometimes there were a dozen boys in it, each paying two pence a week, and he added later a more advanced class for their seniors.

Wright's favourite studies at this time were mathematics and languages. A temporary stoppage of the mill in February, 1876, gave him a holiday. He had saved forty pounds, and he resolved to go to Germany. It was then that he left his home and his mother for the first time. "We both knew how necessary it was for me to go for my future development, I felt that I must go to that country of scholars, and I went." Whatmough wrote: "His reason for going to Germany at all was the fact that he had heard men in the factory talking about the Franco-Prussian war and he was inspired to learn something about Europe at first hand, just as talk about events of the day had stimulated him in the first place to wish to be able to read at least a newspaper." ²

To economize his money, Wright walked from Antwerp to Heidelberg, and studied mathematics and German there for eleven

week. When he returned, he had already made up his mind to give up working in a mill and make a career for himself in scholarship. From September, 1876 to April, 1879 he taught at Springfield School, Bradford, at a salary of £40 a year for five days every week, returning home for week-ends. Wright said, "I began school teaching with no traditions, never having been in a school before, either as a boy or master. I had no knowledge of customary routine or methods."³ Perhaps here lies one of the secrets of his subsequent success.

During the same time he contrived to attend classes at the Yorkshire College of Science at Leeds, the forerunner of the present University of Leeds, and prepared himself for the London University Matriculation. He passed that examination on July 24, 1878; he was twenty-three years old then, and was placed in the First Division. He took English, French, German, and Latin, besides mathematics and chemistry. We should say that it was a fine record for one who had only begun to learn to read and write just eight years before.

In April, 1879 Wright became a resident assistant master at Grove Park School, Wrexham—a well-established Wesleyan School—and remained there about two years. He then spent a short time at Roubaix to improve his French, giving lessons in English and mathematics to maintain himself. Next he was an undermaster at a school at Margate with a salary of £100 a year, but finding the boys lazy and the discipline bad, he quarrelled with the head master, and left in a few months.

1882 was the turning point in Wright's life. He passed the Intermediate examination for the London B. A. in that year, but resolved to go no farther, and to complete his education by studying at a German university. Accordingly he matriculated at Heidelberg in the spring of 1882, intending to study mathematics, but he was fascinated by the lectures of Professor Hermann Osthoff,⁴ and resolved to devote all his time and energy to Comparative Philology. He felt that his earlier studies had been a useful

training for the new one. "Everybody who would be a philologist," he said, "must have done mathematics, or be capable of doing mathematics." But philology was not entirely new to him. "Long before I thought of going to study in Germany I had made myself intimately acquainted with the works of Grimm,⁵ Schleicher,⁶ and Curtius.⁷"

His progress was rapid. After having undergone the necessary training under Osthoff, Bartsch,⁸ Holthausen,⁹ in 1885 he proceeded to the examination for the degree of Ph. D., which he obtained *insigni cum laude*. His thesis was *the Qualitative and Quantitative Changes of the Indo-Germanic Vowel System in Greek*. The comparative philology of the Indo-Germanic languages, the grammar of the Germanic languages in detail, and Anglo-Saxon language and literature were his principal and secondary subjects.

In 1886 Wright matriculated at Leipzig in order to extend his knowledge of languages, phonetics, and German literature. The full range of his studies in Germany was set out in detail in the preface to his testimonials when he became a candidate for the Deputy-Professorship of Comparative Philology at Oxford in February, 1891.¹⁰ Namely, during the six years of his studentship at Heidelberg and Leipzig, he attended full courses of lectures upon the Comparative and Historical Grammar of the following languages :

Sanskrit Grammar	
Latin	Osthoff
Greek	
Gothic	
Old Bulgarian	Leskien ¹¹
Lithuanian	
Russian	Scholvin
Old Icelandic Grammar	
Old Saxon	Kögel
Old High German	

Middle High German Grammar	von Bahder
Anglo-Saxon Grammar	Holthausen

In addition to these, he also attended Osthoff's lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Indogermanic languages; Techmer's lectures on the general principles of Comparative Philology; Zarncke's¹² and Bartsch's lectures on the History of German literature, and Holthausen's lectures on Anglo-Saxon literature. He was a member of the 'Seminar' of Bartsch, Zarncke, Kögel, and von Bahder. He wrote: "For the purpose of learning how to grasp and fully understand the minute processes of sound-change, I attended full courses of lectures on practical phonetics both in Heidelberg (Holthausen) and Leipzig (Techmer), and have devoted a considerable amount of attention to the study of Modern English dialects for the important light which they throw upon the general principles of language. Both of these lines of study are known to be necessary to the student of Comparative Philology, who desires to have a clear perception of the precise nature of sounds, and to distinguish between sounds and the symbols used to represent them in any given dialect or language, as well as to be able to register and systematize the sound-laws of unwritten languages."

Other lectures not included in the list above are: Professor Sutterlin's lectures on Historical German Grammar; Kuno Fischer's¹³ on German Literature, and Fritz Neumann's on Romance languages.

In the autumn of 1883 Wright left Heidelberg and went to Freiburg-in-Breisgau for one semester, where he attended the lectures of Professor Paul,¹⁴ Professor Brugmann,¹⁵ and Professor Neumann. On May 10, 1884, he was once more a registered student at Heidelberg.¹⁶

In short, Joseph Wright at the outset of his student career embraced the tenets of the New School of Grammarians, the 'Junggrammatiker'.¹⁷

While he was at Heidelberg Wright eked out his savings by

teaching mathematics at Neuenheim College—a boarding school for English boys in the suburb across the Neckar. But both at Heidelberg and Leipzig he found time to enjoy the social life of German universities. He made many friends among his fellow-students, joined a club, and though he had never touched beer till he came to Germany, became as expert a judge of the various brews of Munich as he was of wool. He also went to the theatre occasionally, and took long walking tours with his friends in the vacations. Now he was able to earn money by his pen as well as by teaching, and he entered into a contract with the publishing firm of Julius Groos of Heidelberg to examine and revise educational books in four modern languages at a fixed annual salary. During his long connection with the firm he supervised the issue of about thirty books. He also undertook to translate at so much per sheet the first volume of Professor Brugmann's *Grunderiss der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen*, under the supervision of its author. His translation appeared in the spring of 1888, some months after he had left Germany.

Wright spent the winter of 1887–8 in London. Max Müller,¹⁸ who had heard Wright's history in the north, and believed that poverty and hard work were the making of a scholar, got him to come to Oxford. His support resulted in the appointment as lecturer to the Association for the Higher Education of Women in Oxford, to teach Gothic, Anglo-Saxon, and Old German. At Easter, 1888, a more lucrative post followed. A. A. Macdonell, who since 1880 had been German Lecturer at the Taylor Institution, wished to get time to work at his *Sanskrit Dictionary*, and Wright acted as his deputy for the next four terms at £50 per term. Among his early friends in Oxford was Professor Arthur Napier.¹⁹ Through him Wright obtained an introduction to Sir William Markby, the Reader in Indian Law. The result of this was that Sir Markby sent him students to be coached in German for the Indian Civil Service. To add to his income in these early Oxford years, he also undertook a good deal of work correcting

examination papers. "Since coming to Oxford," he told a friend in July, 1888, "I have spent £60 on books. How thankful and pleased I am to be in a position to purchase the necessary tools." He proved himself such an efficient teacher that in June, 1890, when his employment as Macdonell's deputy ended, the Curator of the Taylorian created a special lectureship in Teutonic Philology for Wright's benefit. According to Wright, the election was chiefly due to Professor Napier and Dr. Beubauer. The salary was only £25 a term, but Wright said: "It gave me the first real start in life, and that was the reason for my long devotion to the Taylor." The subjects he chose for the first term were Gothic, Middle High German Lyrical Poetry, and Historical German Grammar.

In March, 1894, he was made M. A. by decree of Convocation, and in November of that year he matriculated as a Non-Collegiate member of Oxford University.

During these years he began the publication of his primers. The Clarendon Press at first rejected his *Gothic Primer*, which did not appear till 1892, but it published his *Primers of Middle High German* and *Old High German* in 1888. He earned also a great reputation as a teacher. "It would be impossible," declared the two secretaries of the Women's Association, "to find a more thorough, clear, or methodical teacher, or one with more enthusiasm for his subject." Wright attributed his success largely to the fact that he was self-taught. "When I came to teach these things I was able to present the difficulties to my pupils in an entirely new way, because I knew exactly where my difficulties had been." Before he had been three years in Oxford he knew every one interested either in English or in the science of languages, gained general respect by his character and his knowledge, and made some life-long friends. He used to say later that Oxford was 'the most cosmopolitan University in the world.' ... 'A man could make his way there if he had the will: it did not depend upon birth or social status, but upon work.'

Mr. Sayce,²⁰ who had been deputy to the Professor of Comparative Philology since 1876, resigned at the end of 1890, and Wright became a candidate for the post. The collection of twenty testimonials which Wright was able to produce in support of his candidature amply showed that his outstanding genius and scholarship had already been recognized by his teachers in Germany, and by his friends and colleagues both at home and abroad. Chief among his supporters was Professor Brugmann, the great originator and leader of the 'Junggrammatiker' School. "I could not wish for a better Deputy," wrote Max Müller, while Murray, Napier, and other Oxford authorities reinforced by their personal evidence the eulogistic testimonials of German experts. Even Henry Sweet, who became the competitor for Professorship in 1901, wrote at this time: "I have for many years watched with interest and sympathy the extraordinary industry and perseverance with which you have pursued the study of Comparative Philology. I do not know that any Englishman has a greater knowledge of it than yourself."²¹ Wright was elected in February, 1891. The statutes required him to give twenty-four lectures a year, but during the ten years for which he held the post he never gave less than forty-two, besides a large amount of private instruction. He lectured now on the Comparative Grammar of the Indo-Germanic languages in general, and also on Comparative Greek and Latin Grammar.

At this time his intention was to make 'a big Comparative Greek Grammar', his *magnum opus*, and he had already written out the phonology of the vowels for press. But this Greek Grammar would require many years for its completion, so Wright turned first to a lighter task. He was wont to say that he knew many languages, but that the only one of which he was really master was the dialect he had spoken for the first fifteen years of his life. Having learned the first principles of linguistic science in Germany he proceeded to apply them to his native speech, and began to put together in 1886 his *Grammar of the Dialect of*

Windhill in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The Dialect Society published the volume in 1892 .

One result of the publication of this book was to divert Wright's efforts still further from his big Greek Grammar. Ever since its foundation in 1873 the English Dialect Society had projected the production of a Dialect Dictionary. For some time past Wright had been pressed to take it in hand. The story of its origin is told by Professor Skeat, 'the father and real originator of the work.'

After meeting with much success in the collection of dialectal words, by the help of the English Dialect Society, founded and for many years presided over by myself, the work came at last to an absolute standstill, owing to the impossibility of finding an editor capable of compiling a dictionary from the materials. It was soon perceived that no one but an accomplished phonetician could hope for any success in preparing such materials for the press, and in superintending the issue of the work in a final and intelligible form. After the work has thus been at a standstill for at least a couple of years. . . . I was so fortunate as to discover in Dr. Wright the only man capable of undertaking this task.

In June, 1887, Skeat tentatively suggested the task to Wright, and in January, 1889, Wright told his friend Holthousen that if he could get 'something permanent and worth having' in England he should settle down to dialect work, and edit the projected *Dialect Dictionary*. His appointment as Deputy-Professor gave him the required position, and in the summer of 1891 he took a house in Norham Road, Oxford, to hold himself and his materials. Twelve large cases weighing about a ton, and containing a million slips were sent him by the Dialect Society. On examination he judged that another million slips would be necessary. By circulars, public addresses, and the formation of Local Committees he got together 600 voluntary helpers, and accumulated the additional evidence needed. He also collected dialect books to the value of six hundred pounds, and in 1894 began to experiment in

the printing of specimen pages.

No obstacle daunted Wright. "The real pleasures of life," he once said, "were derived from overcoming difficulties." But there was one difficulty that seemed insuperable, and that was how to provide for the cost of publishing the Dictionary. At the end of 1889 the balance in the hands of the Dialect Society was only sixteen pounds. No one was willing to finance such an undertaking at least no commercial publisher. The Oxford University Press, with the experience of the NED fresh in mind, was definite in its refusal. The Cambridge Press also refused as well as John Murray, Black, and Flowde. The only expedient left was for the editor to publish the book by subscription at his own risk. The Delegates of the Clarendon Press were so afraid of responsibility that they would not allow their agents to collect subscriptions, lest they should seem committed thereby 'to some kind of guarantee with regard to' the appearance of the work.' But fortunately they proved willing to let Wright a couple of rooms at a nominal rent, and he transferred the books and slips from his house to this workshop in the summer of 1895.

Wright took the responsibility of financing as well as editing the Dictionary. He put all the £2,000 he had saved into the enterprise, collected subscriptions himself, and applied for government aid. He was fortunate in gaining the interest of Arthur James Balfour, who at that time was Minister of Education, and through him in securing the patronage of Queen Victoria. That is, the Royal Bounty Fund granted £600 (£200 a year during these years), and in July, 1898 a Civil List Pension of £200 a year was granted to the editor.

Wright performed his task with punctuality. The first volume appeared in 1896, and the sixth and last in 1905. The total expenditure was somewhere around twenty-five thousand pounds. The *English Dialect Grammar* came out in the following September. It was not merely an introduction, but independent work, and in Wright's opinion, 'philologically far more important than

the Dictionary.' At any rate, Wright was used to describe the Dictionary as 'the work by which I hope to be remembered.' Its production had occupied him from the forties to the fifties year of his life. At the end of those ten years he might have said as Chapman did when he completed his translation of Homer: "The work which I was born to do is done."

Wright had learned a valuable lesson. The dictionary was essentially his property; at least had not involved him in loss. In fact, Wright did succeed in building up a small fortune.

He was not only occupied with the project of the Dictionary during these years. Side by side, he engaged in several public lectures, mainly attempting at evoking popular interest in 'dialects'. For instance, in 1898 he addressed at the annual meeting of Yorkshire Dialect Society; in 1900 at Bradford, he delivered an address to the members of the Philosophical Society on the 'Philological and Ethnological Importance of English Dialect.'

While the *Dictionary* was still in progress, he was building firm foothold in Oxford, too. He had been elected to succeed Max Müller as Professor of Comparative Philology, in 1901, defeating Henry Sweet. When the completion of the Dictionary relieved him from the heavy responsibility he had assumed, he bought an acre of land in north Oxford, and built himself a house there. He called it 'Thackley', and roofed it with stone brought from a quarry near his old home. He purchased the building materials and hired the workmen, instead of employing a contractor, and saved a considerable sum by this plan, as he had done by undertaking the publication of the dictionary himself. He adopted the same method in publishing the grammars he subsequently produced.

Also he was eager to devote to the service of the University with the same talent shown in the Dictionary project and the episode of building his own house. The two main directions in which his interest lay were towards the development of the study of English and Modern Languages.

Though the statute establishing an English School had been passed in 1894, the University provided no adequate instruction in English Literature till the appointment of Sir Walter Raleigh as professor in 1904. A Committee was then formed which arranged systematic courses of lectures and classes, devised a plan for raising fees to pay for additional teachers, and established a special library for the use of English students. Wright was throughout one of the leading members of 'the English Committee', and the institution of the 'English Fund' was largely the work of Joseph Wright. In addition to that his active interest in young students led him to evolve and set in motion in 1913 a 'course of English Studies for Foreigners at University of Oxford,' and the management was practically all done by him.

Modern Languages continued to be unrepresented among the Honor Schools. It was not till 1903 that the goal was reached. Wright took an important share in the organization and development of the English School, but the part he played in advancing the School of Modern Languages was still greater, and more important in its results. More than half a century before that date Sir Robert Taylor's endowment had provided rooms for lectures, a fine library, and a small staff of teachers, but neglect, hostility, and the narrowness of the examination system had for many years made the teaching mainly elementary and prevented the development of the study. Wright, who as professor was ex officio one of the Curators of the Taylorian, became almost at once their inspiring spirit, and was from 1909 to 1926 the Secretary of the Board. A bold and comprehensive policy was adopted, and consistently pursued by the Curators. Between 1905 and 1914 two new professorships were founded, and several new lecturers were added to the staff, elementary classes were supplemented by advanced teaching, some departmental libraries were created, and an efficient system of instruction in five modern languages was organized. The number of students was more than doubled, and to provide for the necessity of increased accommodation in

the future four adjacent houses were purchased for the extension of the building; the funds needed for these purposes were derived from the Taylorian endowment, from lecture fees, from increased University grants, and from Sir Julius Wernher and other private benefactors. Wright himself subscribed very generously towards the purchase of the houses and the provision of new lectureships, and managed the finances of the study with great ability.

In October, 1908, Wright was elected a member of the Hebdomadal Council, which forms the governing body of the University—a Board of Directors, as it were. He devoted a great deal of energy to the pension scheme, collecting and tabulating statistics and general information relating to the methods practised in German university. Though the measure for that purpose introduced in 1913 failed to pass, the evidence he had collected proved of use ten years later.

Wright's view of the functions of professors was also based on his observations in Germany. His theory was set forth in a memorandum written for the University Commission in 1920 and was exemplified by his practice. A professor's most important duty was to teach others the subject he professed, and it was part of it to remedy the defects of existing text-books by writing better ones. "Continental professors," he told the Commission, "attach very great importance to the provision of first-rate text-books on their subject, but here it is generally thought to be beneath the dignity of a Professor to write such books, whereas it is in reality only a Professor who knows his subject from all points of view, who is in a proper position to do work of this kind."

In fact, as soon as he was free from the *Dictionary* he set to work to revise the primers for beginners which he had already written, and started a new series of grammar on a larger scale, and accordingly a second edition of the *Old High German Primer* appeared in June, 1906, followed by a third in 1917. The *Gothic Primer* had reached its second edition in 1899: in 1910 it was

converted into a *Gothic Grammar*, with the Gospel of St. Mark, and other selections from the Bible added. The larger series of historical and comparative grammars began in 1907 with the *Historical German Grammar*, which was a substantial volume of over 300 pages. In 1908 appeared the *Old English Grammar* which reached a second edition in 1914, and a third in 1925. The third of the series was the *Comparative Grammar of Greek*, which Wright began in 1892, and brought out at last in 1912.

Next came the question of professorial teaching. The statutes of the University usually defined the duties of a professor as the delivery of a certain number of lectures per annum computed according to the amount of his salary. Wright did not underestimate the importance of lectures. "It used to take me a dreadful long time to write a good set of lectures," he once said; yet for many years he gave more than the number the statutes required. By itself, however, he thought lecturing an inadequate method of teaching, and held that professors should supplement it by holding classes and giving instruction for several hours a week. According to him, 'it is in just this method of coming into direct contact with the men in class-work and in private intercourse that a professor can exercise that stimulating influence upon men which encourages them to take a keen interest in their studies, and to aspire to a higher and wider standard of knowledge than is usually required for examination purpose. It is only in this way that men can be taught how to work for themselves in a scientific and scholarly manner, and to be in a position to pursue their studies further after they leave the University.'²³

Wright practised this doctrine. He possessed a remarkable knowledge of the character and capacity of his students, and his correspondence shows that he continued to advise and help them in dealing with problems of teaching or research in their later career.

The war suspended the development of the English and the Modern Language Schools. Male students were reduced to a hand-

ful, though there were still large classes of women, and the number of teachers was much diminished. No man worked harder during those years than Wright. Besides his own lecturing duties he undertook the work of Professor Napier for the English School, did part of the teaching of German, and finally performed the ordinary duties of the clerk to the Taylorian Curators. He also published in 1917 a third and much enlarged edition of his *Middle High German Primer*.

The revival of studies and the reorganization of the University after the war added to Wright's labours. He hoped to give evidence before the University Commission appointed in November, 1919, and drew up two memoranda to submit to it, but he fell ill before the Commission met, and was unable to appear in support of them. Prolonged overwork and unwholesome diet during the later years of the war had destroyed Wright's robust health. Suddenly taken ill in January, 1920, he spent nearly a couple of months in Leicester Infirmary, and underwent a serious operation in the following June. It was not till the autumn of 1921 that he was fit to resume his lectures, and another year passed before he could begin writing again. "I am now naturally obliged to take care of myself," he wrote to a friend in 1924, "but for a long time back I have been able to work solidly for 50 or 60 hours a week without being run down or feeling tired." Three new grammars were published in rapid succession: the *Elementary Old English Grammar* and the *Elementary Middle English Grammar* appeared in 1923, and the *Elementary New English Grammar* in 1924. These, nominally designed for beginners, were something between the Primers and the larger Comparative Grammars. He had in his mind a fourth book of the same type to be entitled *Historical English Grammar*. It was meant 'to combine the essential elements of the three previous books, leaving aside in each period of the language as far as possible all side issues and problematic questions, and concentrating on the sounds, inflexions, and native vocabulary which are the basis of living stand-

ard English.'

Wright resigned his professorship at the end of 1924, at the age of 69, not because, according to him, he was worn out but because he was always determined never to be described as 'Poor Old Wright!' In May, the title of Professor Emeritus was conferred on Wright by a Decree in Convocation.

At the resignation he hoped that when he was able to devote himself to his own private work he could succeed in completing *Historical English Grammar*, and add to it historical and philological gramars of other languages 'to serve as text-books for the younger gengration of University students.' These schemes were frustrated by the steady decay of his health. The first real warning came in June, 1925, so called 'stroke', and again in 1927. Now the words, 'I have had a good innings', were frequently on his lips. Trouble also befell his eyesight in 1928. The last book he was able to publish was the enlarged and revised edition of his *Middle English Grammar* which came out in January, 1928. In announcing its appearance to a friend, he said, "I have definitely given up all idea of ever writing a new book, or of finishing the one I was writing before my illness." The Latin Grammar at which he had been busily working as far back as 1912, had been put aside during the war, and postponed again for the sake of the three English Grammars; it was now given up altogether, though much of it was written out in final manuscript for the printer. The epitome of the Dialect Dictionary, which he had prepared by Skeat's advice many years previously, was delayed owing to increased cost of printing, and remained also unpublished.

Wright's private life must be mentioned somewhere. "The precise date when Joseph Wright I first met," wrote Mrs. Wright, "is on October 16, 1888."²⁴ Elizabeth Mary Lea was a second-year student at Lady Margaret Hall, and Joseph Wright was her new Lecturer. Under his supervision she produced a grammar of the Northumbrian Dialect, based on the Northumbrian version of the gospels, which was printed in *Anglia* in 1893. She was then

appointed, by his recommendation, tutor in Old English and Middle English to the Association for the Education of Women in Oxford. At the beginning it seemed that Miss Lea tried to convince herself and demonstrate to Joseph Wright that the ground on which he and she came into contact with each other was the rational and prosaic field of philology, and that any approach on a more personal footing was inadmissible on either side. But he was accustomed to get the very thing he wanted. "When I once make up my mind that such a thing is the right thing to take place, I move almost heaven and earth to see that it shall take place." However, it was not till eight years later that Joseph Wright made up his mind to bring to an end his years of silence. He wrote to Miss Lea on June 1, 1896 and asked her to marry him. You will see through the letters written from that day on Wright's ideals of Love and Life and how their love developed. To Joseph it was no mere strange coincidence that the first part of his life work was published on the very day of their engagement. It is said that they wrote loveletters in Old English,²⁵ but it is no more than a legend which is likely to be made up for a famous person. A few passages of letters will be quoted.

...The greatest ambition of my life has always been to have some dear woman to love and to be loved by her in return. I have that now, and it is most precious to me, it is more than all the world besides ... Joseph (Aug. 9)²⁶

...I am sure the older we get, the more evident it will become that we two shall have *no two* opinions about anything under the sun ... Joseph (Aug. 20)²⁷

...When your two letters were brought to the bedroom door at 7:30 this morning, they made me feel like a giant refreshed with wine ... Joseph (Sept. 2)²⁸

Lizzie, my dear lizzie, when we two become old, and life is on the wane, it will be our duty to hand down to future generations the life and experience of two truly kindred souls... Joseph (Sept. 8)²⁹

You don't know how much I used to enjoy the hours you used to give me over my Grammar difficulties. I always felt so much 'sharper' when in contact with your mind—and we shall live to feel that still more—... Lea (Sept. 15)³⁰

We have both set ourselves very high ideals, and I am sure we shall live up to them, and we shall grow to have still higher ideals, for we start out new life with such a perfect unity of heart and soul that we shall always go hand in hand along the path of our married life, and be good example to others. Joseph (Sept. 17)³¹

When I go to church on Tuesday to be married to you, there will be no shadow of doubt or fear in my heart. We two have come to the stage of that 'perfect love' which 'casteth out fear'. Lea (Oct. 2)³²

They married on October 6, 1896, after the preparation of the second part had been completed.

To meet his greatest ambition, 'Lizzie would some day join my hands and heart in some work,' Mrs. Wright was his good collaborator. She helped with the clerical work throughout, and acted as sub-editor of the text of the Dictionary. She took a still larger part in the production of the *Dialect Grammar*, and was specially thanked in its preface. Her name appeared on the title-page of many of Wright's later grammars as co-author. Separately Mrs. Wright published *Rustic Speech and Folklore* in 1913

The first baby, Mary, was born on August 11, 1897 and the second, William, on July 16, 1898. Unfortunately, however, both of them died early: William, on April 5, 1902, and Mary, July 6, 1908. From the biography written by Mrs. Wright, we can see Joseph Wright paid much attention to the children's education. He believed in home life training: '... good day schools were at the parents' door, as in Oxford.' According to Wright, if a child dislikes arithmetic it is a sure sign of bad teaching. He maintained that every child takes naturally to arithmetic if the subject is treated in the right way from the start.

Joseph Wright could never live without a dog. The pictures prove that he loved smoking. He was noted also for his fondness of walking. Neither in youth nor aged did Wright ever care for playing cards.

Before closing this biography, one more thing is to be mentioned. That is, there was one project Wright still hoped to carry out, and that was the extension of the Taylor Institution by building on the side of the houses bought for that purpose in 1909-10. As early as 1917 he began private applications to possible benefactors, and he issued in 1920 a public appeal for subscriptions. About £15,000 had been raised by 1923, of which he contributed over £2,000 himself. Since the war the number of students of Modern Languages had greatly increased, while three new professorships and a number of scholarships had been endowed. More rooms for teachers, pupils, and books were needed. In May, 1927, Wright offered the University £10,000 in order to induce it to undertake the extension at once. The gift was subject to the condition that interest on the capital sum should be paid to himself and Mrs. Wright during their lives, but would have made it possible to build what was primarily essential. After more than a year's deliberation, Council proposed a decree for the acceptance of Wright's offer on October, 23 1929, but it was rejected by a small majority in Congregation owing to the opposition of rival interests. The failure of his scheme was a great blow to Wright. A few months later the Local Examination Delegacy voted £10,000 from its surplus for the purpose of extending the Taylorian, and though building was still for some time postponed, the extension was opened by the Prince of Wales on November, 9 1932. Unfortunately Wright did not live to see his desire fulfilled. He died on February, 27 1930, because of pneumonia, leaving to the University of Leeds as a legacy the gift he had offered to Oxford.

Wright's character is the key to his story. "Necessity," he

said, "taught me at a very early age to trust myself." The lesson was easy for a man of his temperament, and the result was lasting. "I have never been depressed in my life," he told his friends. A large and generous simplicity inspired his actions. He combined the energy and courage of self-made men with a scholar's love of knowledge for its own sake, and having attained success, instinctively used position and gains for the advancement of his studies.

The value of the work he did was recognized by many honorary degrees and distinctions. He was created a D. C. L. of the University of Durham in 1898, and L. E. D. of Aberdeen in 1902, of Leeds in 1904, a Litt. D. of Dublin in 1906, and a D. Litt. of Oxford in 1926. He was also an honorary member of the Royal Flemish Academy in 1919, of the Utrecht Society in 1926, of the Royal Society of Letters of Lund in 1928, and of the Modern Language Association of America in 1926.³⁴ He had been elected a Fellow of British Academy on June, 25 1904, and to him it awarded in November, 1925, its first Biennial Prize for English Studies. Also he was presented a 'Festschrift' for his birthday in October, 1925. It says: "Among all living English philologists, none has developed such comprehensive and many-sided literary activity, and one has been so closely allied to German scholarship as Professor Wright of Oxford. In consideration of this, a number of his fellow-workers and friends in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have combined together thus with Part I of Volume VI of *Englische Studien* to lay upon the birthday table of this renowned scholar and splendid man a nosegay of learned essays as a festival gift."³⁵ Many distinguished scholars such as Funke, Jespersen, contributed articles to add his honor.

Chronological Personal History

- 1855 : Joseph Wright was born, October 31
1861 : began to work, 'donkey boy'
1862 : 'doffer'
1863 : Elizabeth Mary Lea (Mrs. Wright) was born, October 16.
1866 : Father died; attended Mechanics Institution
1868 : 'wool-sorter'
1873 : set up evening class
1875 : obtained a certificate of shorthand
1876 : spent 11 weeks in Heideberg; attended Yorkshire College of Bradford
1876 (-79) : a school teacher at Bradford
1878 : passed the University of London matriculation examination
1879 (-81) : a resident master at Grove School, Wrexham
1882 : passed the Intermediate Examination for the degree of B. A., University of London; went to Heidelberg
1883 : went to Freiburg-in-Vreisgau for one semester
1884 : came back to Heidelberg
1885 : took Ph. D. at Heidelberg
1886 : attended University of Leipzig; translation of the first volume of Brugmann's *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen*
1886 (-1912): supervised the issue of 29 books for the firm of Julius Groos
1888 : was appointed lecturer to the Association for the Higher Education of Women in Oxford; was appointed deputy lecturer in German at Taylor Institution; *A Middle High German Primer; An Old High German Primer*
1890 : obtained lectureship in Teutonic Philology; "English Mundarten," *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, I
1891 : deputy to the Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford in succession to the Rev. A. H. Sayce
1892 : *A Gothic Primer; A Grammar of the Dialect of Windhill in the West Riding of Yorkshire*
1896 : (-1905): *The English Dialect Dictionary*
1896 : married Elizabeth Mary Lea

- 1897 : Mary was born
- 1898 : William was born; Honorary degree from University of Durham
- 1899 : 2nd edition, *A Middle High German Primer*; 2nd edition, *A Gothic Primer*
- 1901 : succeeded Max Müller as Professor of Comparative Philology
- 1902 : William died; Honorary degree from Aberdeen
- 1903 : Mother died
- 1904 : Honorary degree from Leeds ;elected a fellow of the British Academy
- 1905 : *The English Dialect Grammar*
- 1906 : Honorary degree from Dublin; read a paper at a meeting of the Fellows: 'The Philological Value of English Dialects' (the paper was never printed); 2nd edition, *An Old High German Primer*
- 1907 : *Historical German Grammar*
- 1908 : Mary died; *Old English Grammar*
- 1908 (-14) : member of the Hebdomadal Council
- 1910 : *Grammar of the Gothic Language*
- 1912 : *Comparative Grammar of the Greek Language*
- 1913 : organized a special course for foreign students
- 1914 : 2nd edition, *Old English Grammar*
- 1917 : 3rd edition, *A Middle High German Primer*; 2nd edition, *Grammar of the Gothic Language*
- 1919 : Honorary member of the Royal Flemish Academy
- 1920 : taken ill
- 1923 : *An Elementary Old English Grammar* ; *An Elementary Middle English Grammar*
- 1924 : resigned professorship; *An Elementary Historical New English Grammar*
- 1925 : Professor Emeritus; was awarded its first biennial prize for English Studies by British Academy
- 1926 : Honorary degree from Oxford; Honorary member of the Utrecht Society; Honorary member of Modern Language Association of America
- 1928 : *Middle English Grammar*; Honorary member of the Royal Society of Letters of Lund

1930 : died at Oxford, February 27

FOOTNOTES

¹Joshua Whatmough, "Profiles of Noted Linguists: Joseph Wright," *Word Study*, 29:2 (1953), p.1.

²Main sources are: (1) J. Boyd, "Joseph Wright," *Dictionary of National Biography*. (2) C. B. Firth, "Obituary Notice: Joseph Wright," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol.18 (1932). (3) Johannes Hoops, "Joseph Wright," *Englische Studien*, 60 (1925), pp.3-16. (4) Tatsu Sasaki, "Joseph Wright," *Essays in Philology* (Tokyo, 1950), pp. 203-18. (5) Joshua Whatmough, "Profiles of Noted Linguists: Joseph Wright," *Word Study*, 29:2 (1953). (6) Elizabeth Mary Wright, *The Life of Joseph Wright*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1932).

PART 1

¹Elizabeth Mary Wright, *The Life of Joseph Wright* (Oxford, 1932), p.19.

²Joshua Whatmough, "Profiles of Noted Linguists: Joseph Wright," *Word Study*, 29:2 (1953), p.2.

³E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*, p.62.

⁴Hermann Osthoff (1847-1909) with Brugmann the head of the 'new grammarians', became connected with the University of Leipzig in 1875. In 1877 he was named assistant professor and the following year professor of Sanskrit and comparative grammar at Heidelberg. He was one of the founders and editors of *Morphologische Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen* (5 vols., 1878-90; vol. vi, 1910), and wrote several books.

⁵Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) was the first scholar to write a comparative grammar clearly dedicated to the new historic-organic method of research. Largely through the influence of Rask's essay, Grimm came to realize the significance of phonology—the study of the history of sounds within a given language or group of languages as preserved in written records. Needless to mention here about Grimm's Law.

⁶August Schleicher (1821-68) was interested in philosophy, natural science, and linguistics. As a student at Tübingen he became an ardent Hegelian, later in his life he was strongly influenced by Charles Darwin, and in his last years he sought, by a synthesis of Hegel's theory of history and Darwin's theory of natural selection, to present a logical and demonstrable theory of language. His *Compendium der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen* was for years a recognized and authoritative text. Schleicher's three most notable contributions to linguistics are his theory of language relationship, his "comparative method" of reconstructing a parent language, and his classification of languages into types (taxonomy). He believed strongly in the independent, life-like development of languages. He refers specifically to the Indo-European "family tree", and drew up a genealogical chart. He classified language into "isolating" (e.g. Chinese),

"agglutinative" (e.g. Turkish) and "inflectional (or synthesized)" (e.g. Latin). See J. T. Waterman, *Perspectives in Linguistics* (U. of Chicago, 1963), pp. 31–43 for a good brief comment on Schleicher.

⁷George Curtius (1820–1885) held philological appointment at Prague, Kiel, and Leipzig. His philological theories exercised a widespread influence. The more important of his publications are: *Die Sprachvergleichung in ihrem Verhältniss zur classischen Philologie* (1845); *Sprachvergleichende Beiträge zur griechischen und lateinischen Grammatik* (1846); *Grundzüge der griechischen Etymologie* (1858–62, 5th ed. 1879); *Das Verbum der griechischen Sprache* (1873). From 1878 until his death Curtius was general editor of the *Leipziger Studien zur classischen Philologie*. His *Griechischen Schulgrammatik*, first published in 1852, has passed through more than 20 editions, and has been edited in English. In his last work, *Zur Kritik der neuesten Sprachforschung* (1885), he attacks the views of the "new" school of philology.

⁸Karl Bartsch (1832–88) was appointed professor of German and Romance philology at Rostock in 1858, and a professor at Heidelberg in 1871. In addition to his other works, he translated and edited the *Nibelungenlied*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and other medieval German works, and compiled chrestomathies (selections) of Provencal and Old French literature, including the *Chrestomathie de l'ancien francais*.

⁹Ferdinand Holthausen (1860–?) became lecturer at Heidelberg in 1885 and at Göttingen in 1887; was made professor at Giessen in 1892; taught Germanics in Gothenburg, Sweden, English Philology at Kiel. He edited many Old English and Middle English texts.

¹⁰Cf. E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 75f.

¹¹August Leskien (1840–1916) was a student at Jena, with A. Schleicher, whom he succeeded in 1869 after having taught two years in Göttingen. In 1870 he went as professor of Slavic linguistics to Leipzig, where he stayed until his death. Leskien was the first linguist to make the doctrine of the phonetic law the basis of his work, a step that he took in his book *Die Deklination im Slavisch-Litauischen und Germanischen* (1876). He may therefore be rightly considered as the founder of the Leipzig school of the neogrammarians, which dominated German linguistics for several decades. His main works were dedicated to Slavic and Lithuanian linguistics; among the most important ones are *Handbuch der altbulgarischen Sprache* (1871), *Grammatik der altbulgarischen Sprache* (1909), *Grammatik der serbokroatischen Sprache* (1914), and *Litauische Volkslieder und Märchen* (1882), with K. Brugmann.

¹²Friedrich Zarncke (1825–91) founded the *Litterarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland* (1850), edited the *Narrenschiff*, *Nibelungenlied*, and others, and wrote on the *Nibelungenlied*, on the history of the legends of the Grail, and on the University of Leipzig, and others.

¹³Ernst Kuno Berthold Fischer (1824–1907), educated at Leipzig and Halle, became a *Privatdozent* at Heidelberg in 1850, and in 1856 a professor at Jena. In 1872 he succeeded Zeller at Heidelberg as professor of philosophy and of the history of modern German literature. In philosophy, where his attitude was mainly Hegelian, his part was that of a historian and commentator, his chief production being *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (1852–93). Fischer also made valuable contribution to the study of Kant.

Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Bacon, Shakespeare, Goethe, Lessing and Schiller.

¹⁴ Herman Paul (1846–1921) studied in Berlin and Leipzig, received his doctoral degree in 1870, and became *Privatdozent* in Leipzig in 1872. From 1874 to 1893 he taught at Freiburg in Brisgau; in 1893 he went to Munich, where he lived the rest of his life. He retired in 1916, and became blind, but continued his work. Paul is probably the most distinguished theoretician of the Neogrammarian school, founded by Leskien, Osthoff, and Brugmann. While his essential principles are the same as those of his three predecessors Paul gave to their ideas a broader background, attributing a greater importance to the psychological element in language and to the contribution of the individual to linguistic changes. His book *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (1880) has exercised an enormous influence and is a model of clarity and coherence. Paul was a specialist in Germanic languages, and his work in this field is enormous. He directed and edited the *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie* (1891) and, with W. Braune and E. Sievers, published the *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, in which several important works of Paul himself appeared. Later he concentrated on German and published the *Mittelhochdeutsche Grammatik* (1881), the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1896), and the *Deutsche Grammatik* (1916–20), all of them essential works for the study of German.

¹⁵ Friedrich Karl Brugmann (1849–1919) became professor of comparative philology at the University of Leipzig in 1882, whence he went to the University of Freiburg to take the chair of Sanskrit and comparative philology, but returned to Leipzig in 1887. Brugmann, by his fresh and progressive views of a science that many believed to have become too static, greatly influenced the development of philology in Germany and elsewhere. His *Nasalis Sonans in der Indogermanischen Grundsprache* (1876) caused some controversy, but his *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der Indogermanischen Sprachen*, which appeared in the period 1886–93, and was translated into English under the title *Outline of the Comparative Grammar of the Indo-Germanic Languages*, was at once accepted as an authoritative work. He was coauthor also of *Morphologische Untersuchungen*, of which the first five volumes were published between 1878 and 1890, and the sixth volume in 1910. Brugmann, who was knighted by the king of Saxony, was among the notable scholars from many lands who by invitation attended the jubilee of Princeton University in 1896, on which occasion he received from that University the honorary degree of LL. D.

¹⁶ His detailed life in Germany, his impressions, and remarks on professors will be found in letters quoted in E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ The name 'Junggrammatiker' is generally given to a group of young philologists who in the last quarter of the nineteenth century fought for the recognition of certain linguistic principles first stated by Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugmann in their *Morphologische untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen* (Leipzig, 1878). The most important of these principles was that 'the laws of sound change admit of no exception', that is to say that within the limits of any language or dialect at a particular period all sounds have changed into the same other sounds, and where various sounds are seen to replace one and the same sound the cause must be sought in the difference of phonetic conditions, such as varying accent, proximity to other sounds, or in the influence of analogy. After a prolonged and heated controversy, in which all the leading philologists took part,

these principles were, with certain modifications, universally adopted.

¹⁸ Max Friedrich Müller (1823–1900): Anglo-German orientalist and comparative philologist, whose works stimulated widespread interest in the study of linguistics, mythology, and religion. Hermann Brockhous of the University of Leipzig, where Müller matriculated in 1841, induced him to take up Sanskrit; Franz Bopp, at Berlin (1844), transformed the Sanskrit student into a comparative philologist. In 1848 the printing of his *Rig Veda* at the University press obliged him to settle in Oxford. Müller was appointed deputy Taylorian professor of modern languages in 1850, and became an honorary fellow of Christ Church and a fellow of All Souls. When at last the chair of Sanskrit fell vacant in 1860, Müller failed to secure election. In 1868 he was elected to a newly established chair of comparative philology, but he ceased to lecture in 1875 when he entered upon the editorship of the *Sacred Books of the East*. He was a curator of the Bodleian library and a delegate of the University Press.

¹⁹ Arthur Sampson Napier (1853–1916) received his early education at Rugby, attending later Owent College, Manchester, and Exeter College, Oxford, where he was granted the degree of Doctor of Letters. From 1878 to 1882 he was reader of English at the University of Berlin, where, having continued his studies, he took the Ph. D. at the end of this period. After three years as Professor of English at the University of Göttingen, in 1885 he was elected Merton professor of English at Oxford, and in 1903 also Rawlinson professor of Anglo-Saxon in the same institution.

²⁰ Archibald Henry Sayce (1845–1933), British philologist, whose services to Babylonian and Assyrian scholarship cannot be overestimated. He was educated at Bath, and at Queen's College, Oxford, becoming a fellow in 1867. From 1876 to 1890 he was deputy professor of comparative philology and from 1891 to 1919 professor of Assyriology at Oxford.

²¹ Cf. E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

²² C. B. Firth, "Obituary Notice: Joseph Wright," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 18 (1932), p. 428.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 433–4

²⁴ E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

²⁵ Sanki Ichikawa, *Eigogaku* (English Philology) (Tokyo, 1947), p. 47; "Igirisu no Hogengaku (English Dialectology)," *The Rising Generation*, 98:6 (1952), p. 242.

²⁶ E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 284

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 294

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 324–5

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 342.

³³ E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

³⁴It says in the constitution, III. 5: 'Distinguished foreign scholars may be elected to honorary membership by the Association on nomination by the Executive Council. But the number of honorary members shall not at any time exceed forty' (PMLA, 42. xlix (1927)). The then honorary members were as follows: K. von Bahder (Darmstadt, Germany), Willy Bang (University of Berlin), Michele Barbi (University of Messina), Joseph Bedier (College de France, Paris), Alois L. Brandl (University of Berlin), Ferdinand Brunot (University of Paris), Konrad Burdach (Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin), Sir Edmund Chambers (Oxfordshire, England), Vittorio Cian (University of Turin), George Cirot (University of Bordeaux), William A. Craigie (University of Chicago), Benedetto Croce (Naples, Italy), Sir Israel Gollancy (King's College, London), Walter Wilson Greg (London), Charles Harold Herford (University of Manchester), Alfred Jeanroy (University of Paris), Otto Jespersen (University of Copenhagen), J. J. Jusserand (Paris, France), Karl Axel Kock (University of Lund), Eugen Kühnemann (University of Breslan), Gustave Lanson (University of Paris), Abel Lefranca (College de France), Ferdinand Lot (The Sorbonne), Ramon Menendeg Pidal (University of Madrid), W. Meyer-Lübke (University of Bonn), Lorenz Morsbach (Göttingen), Fritz Neumann (University of Heidelberg), Kristoffer Nyrop (University of Copenhagen), Alfred W. Pollard (British Museum, London), Pio Rajna (University of Florence), Mario Rogues (Paris), Vittorio Rosse (University of Rome), George Saintsbury (University of Edinburgh), Edward Schroeder (University of Göttingen), Edward Sievers (University of Leipzig), Antoine Thomas (University of Paris), Rudolph Thurneysen (Bonn), Francesco Torraca (University of Naples), Karl Vossler (Munich), and Joseph Wright (Oxford).

³⁵Quoted in E. M. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 652-3.

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